



From your State Representative

Gigi
Talcott

28th District

2004 Legislative Update

To the citizens of the 28th Legislative District

February 2004

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

No doubt there's a lot going on in your life right now. Thanks for taking a few moments to pick up this newsletter. Inside I'll report on what the people in our communities are saying and which **issues are gaining steam** for this session of the Legislature.

First, please check out my contact information to find me when I'm working out-of-town for the legislative session. Rep. Mike Carrell and I have temporarily moved our computers and legislative assistants to Olympia. We'll be back in our shared, cozy Bridgeport Way office once the work in Olympia is done.

Right now you're welcome to come experience your **Legislature in action**. If you'd like help figuring out how to do that, let me know.

Last year was the longer legislative session when we wrote the state's two-year \$23 billion budget. This year we're in a **"mop up" 60-day session**. Basically, for those 60 days I want two things. First, **hold the line on spending**. And, second, let's continue on a path where our job providers can stop firing employees and **start hiring again**. We'll all be better off! Agree?

Please let me know what you're thinking in a phone call, letter or e-mail – whatever is easiest for you. I'm honored to represent you.

Sincerely,

Gigi Talcott
State Representative

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Legislative information on the Internet:

www.leg.wa.gov

Talcott's legislative homepage:

[http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/
talcott.htm](http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/talcott.htm)

Town Hall Meetings

Please join me with your complaint, compliment or question at a "town hall" meeting:

**Saturday, February 21
9-10 a.m.**

Lakewood Library
6300 Wildaire Road SW
(just off Gravelly Lake Road)

or

**Saturday, February 21
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.**

University Place Library
3605 Bridgeport Way W.

Survey results

Thanks to the hundreds of you and your neighbors who made time to answer the last survey. There were stacks and stacks of them. I read every one. I only wish I could make more hours in the day to personally respond to each of you. Your thoughts are most interesting, insightful, and often compelling. **Here's some of what I learned** from your responses.

Priorities chosen by our neighbors who answered the survey

Your #1 priority – Avoid general tax increases

I'm please to report that last year, when we **faced the state's largest shortfall of dollars in a decade, we successfully balanced the state's \$23 billion budget without raising general fund taxes.** It started with Governor Locke's "Priorities of Government" process and ended with both Republicans and Democrats supporting Senator Dino Rossi's budget. I enthusiastically support your first priority.

Your #2 priority – Make our regulatory climate less costly and cumbersome

I also share your concerns here. Last year, I sponsored and we passed legislation that would require the governor to sign every new rule and regulation that the state agencies under his direction would create. Unfortunately, the **governor vetoed** the bill. He, obviously, has the power to do that. Yet, it's disturbing to me that he doesn't see that excessive regulations drain time, energy and money from our job providers around the state. I'll keep working for you on this one!

Your #3 priority – Improve our transportation infrastructure

We all pay five cents a gallon more for gas. We're starting to see results. Unfortunately, again, new road construction starts with increased traffic problems before we can see smoother traffic flow.

Your #4 priority – Increase investments in K-12 and higher education

The fourth place ranking of "funding for education" surprised me. I thought it might be higher. I'd like to hear more from you about what you're thinking. Actual funding for education (in "real" inflated dollars) has increased slightly the last several years, but that's not what's widely reported.

Survey question #1

Would it be helpful to require schools to work with parents to develop education plans for students who haven't met the state's reading and writing standards? Your answer with 63% support: "Yes, it would be helpful." I'll work with my colleagues to make it happen this year.

Survey question #2

Responses were **most passionate on the school strike issue.** Around 68% of our neighbors who answered the survey supported prohibiting strikes by educational employees. An overwhelming number — almost 80% — said they'd like to make public school contract negotiations part of the government's open meetings act. I'm encouraging the committee chair to hold a public hearing. **Feedback like this is critical to my work in Olympia on your behalf.** Thank you, again, for your valuable input.

Quotes from our community

“*Acknowledge the military's economic impact on our state and identify ways to support its continued operations in our state.*”

As the wife of a military veteran, I agree completely.

“*My #1 concern is the state budget. We need to seriously overhaul/update the taxation and revenue for the state. It's time for an income tax on everyone - both businesses and individuals.*”

I respectfully disagree.

“*What's happening with the boundary changes between school districts?*”

Basically, property taxes are collected to build and support schools. Shouldn't property taxes collected in DuPont be used to build and support schools in DuPont? Fortunately, as the boundary is changing, the bonded indebtedness of Clover Park School District is declining since the Clover Park School District has smartly refinanced some bonds at lower interest rates and other bonds will soon be paid in full. Tacoma and University Place, as well as many school districts around the state, are also working to resolve boundary disputes.

“*Now that lawmakers are recovering from the giddy news of Boeing choosing to remain in Everett for the new 7E7, I hope that you'll address why Boeing wanted to leave in the first place.*”

I agree. Our unemployment rate is still one of the highest in the country. I'll keep working on it.

Report to the 28th District

■ Fiscal responsibility with our state's budget

The most demanding committee in the House of Representatives is Appropriations. I've served for you there four nights a week for five terms. This year I'm working with my colleagues to maintain the **precariously balanced budget** without further diminishing our state's reserves. I don't want us to **slip back into another multi-billion dollar crisis**. Just to maintain current programs will require about \$190 million of new spending for corrections programs (\$94 million), public schools (additional \$47 million), plus millions more for medical assistance costs, increased general assistance caseloads and higher matching fund requirements.

While I've heard a long list of needs, the governor's office predicts another "shortfall" of over \$1 billion before the next two-year state budget. It's vital we **hold the line** now – just as you and your families are.

■ Watch for changes in presidential and state primaries

I reluctantly supported the cancellation of the presidential primary in 2004. It will be reinstated in 2008. This year, Republicans have one serious candidate for president — George W. Bush. Democrats selected their candidate in caucuses February 7. The cancelled primary would have been held over a month after the Democrats' choice was determined. The good news is that this one time change will **save taxpayers about \$6.2 million**.



The U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals declared our popular September "blanket" primary election system unconstitutional. The **people's choice and the court's decision are basically polar opposites**. Without a U.S. Supreme Court decision or the Legislature creating a new primary election system for September, our November ballot could be a big mess. My goal in resolving this problem is to **protect your privacy** at the polls and **protect your current choices** in the November election. I'm open to any advice from you, for sure.

■ Striving for education excellence

Low-skill, yet sometimes high-paying, jobs are disappearing. In 1950, students without strong academic skills could choose from 80% of available jobs. By 2006, it's projected that fewer than 12% of available jobs will be low-skilled – and **they'll be low-paying**. High school graduates today need to be prepared to succeed either in college or job training.

As the ranking Republican on the House Education Committee, my latest nights are spent working with parents, educators and other legislators on education issues. We struggle to find ways to support teachers as they challenge every one of the million **students in our state to reach their highest potential**. This year's most pressing issues are:

- Ensuring there are effective teachers in every classroom
- Increasing opportunities through new and rigorous, yet traditional, web-based instruction, and public charter schools focused on parental choice where students are failing
- Clarifying challenging graduation requirements for all students
- Changing funding formulas so that improving students' reading skills doesn't mean the school will lose its state funding (amazing, yet true)
- Working on proposals to help prevent teacher strikes

Assuring our state primary protects your privacy and choices is a "must do" this session.

State Representative **Gigi Talcott**

■ Rescuing our health care system

Medical malpractice insurance premiums are increasing at an alarming rate. As a result, doctors are having trouble maintaining or expanding their health care services. Many doctors who can't afford higher premiums (including my doctor) are taking early retirement, moving out of state or abandoning high-risk medical services.

Take Pierce County physician John Lenihan for example. As reported in the Tacoma News Tribune, this former Air Force flight surgeon with strong credentials and experience in delivering almost 3,000 babies had his medical malpractice insurance premiums skyrocket. Ten years ago, Dr. Lenihan paid about \$30,000/year for his professional liability policy. This year his renewal was \$74,000. Because of this outrageous cost, he has **abandoned delivering babies** all together.

These costs are tough on patients, too. More and more people either cannot get the health care when they need it, or are having their options limited. Doctors and other medical providers are screaming for relief. It's clearly **time for changes in the rules**. With all the great medicines and advancements in technology, higher costs and fewer options for consumers are unacceptable.

To return doctors to our state and, hopefully, put the "justice" back in our justice system, here are some promising proposals. Let me know if you want some details.

- Joint and several liability reform
- Capping non-economic damages
- Providing time limits on lawsuits
- Changing the burden of proof

■ Saving Lake Steilacoom

Last, but certainly not least...the County Health Department once again posted Lake Steilacoom as toxic. Not only was the lake a stinky, slimy mess totally unsuitable for summer-time sports, it put pets and children's health at risk. This has to end. The government agency that deals with water, Department of Ecology, must **start valuing human health at least as much as it values the future of fish**.

I'm joining with several senators to sponsor legislation to issue permits to treat lakes in Washington through the Department of Agriculture instead of the Department of Ecology. Stay tuned.

Here's one issue we desperately need new leadership from the executive branch of government.

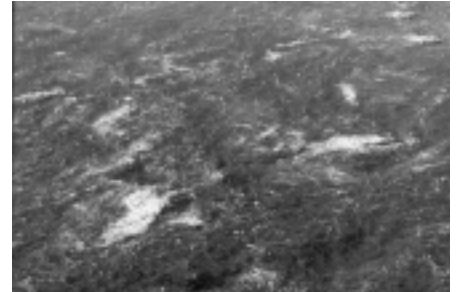


Photo courtesy of Lake Steilacoom Improvement Club.

Election-year restrictions

Since 2004 is an election year, Initiative 134 only allows me to send you two newsletters all year. I encourage you to call, write or e-mail me since I can only respond when it is answering a message from you. Thanks in advance.

Gigi

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